

The Old Paths

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"What Determines Truth?"

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Truth is an endangered thing. Many want nothing to do with the truth. They are like the Gentiles who *"did not like to retain God in their knowledge"* (Rom. 1:28). Why did they not want to retain God in their knowledge? Because God stood in the way of them doing what they pleased!

In like manner truth, the standard between right and wrong, is cast aside by many today. Many people say, "Truth is relative." Therefore, what may be the truth for you, will not be true for me and vice versa. In spiritual matters, truth must be determined by God. Truth itself transcends all lines. If it is right, it is right, if it is wrong, it is wrong.

Let's study and learn what does and does not determine truth.

What Does Not Determine Truth?

Personal Experience

The Methodists say they determine the truth by: 1) The Bible 2) Scholars 3) **Personal Insight/Experience** 4) Reason 5) Tradition. With this in mind, we can understand why the Methodists have changed their beliefs at different times through the years!

Just like the Methodists, there are many people who try to determine the truth based upon what they have experienced in their lives. Consider the

following statements of those who try to determine the truth based upon personal experience.

1. *"I have always heard it said"* Or, *"I have never heard it said"* Before Columbus sailed to the Americas, people had "always heard" that the earth was flat, did this make it the truth? Obviously not!

2. *"I have never done it like that."* Just because something is unknown to you does not necessarily make it wrong. There were several people in the Bible who thought their personal experience revealed the truth. Consider the Athenians who, after hearing Paul preach the truth, "mocked" him (Acts 17:32). Why was this? It is because what Paul said was different from all they had ever experienced. They had "never heard anything like that"! Therefore, they automatically assumed it was wrong.

In like manner, the Jews persecuted Christ and the apostles because what was taught by them was not what the Jews had experienced before. Clearly, personal experience does not determine the truth.

One's Conscience

"Let your conscience be your guide" is the cry of many. The word "conscience" is defined as: *"1. the sense of what is right or wrong in one's conduct or motives, impelling one toward right action. 2. the complex of ethical and moral principles that controls or inhibits the actions or thoughts of an individ-*

ual" (Webster's).

Our conscience can be helpful in our decision-making process, but it depends upon how it was trained. If our conscience is trained right, it will bother us when we do that which is wrong. Otherwise, our conscience will not bother us, even when we do wrong things.

Something interesting to note is the number of people in the New Testament who did the wrong things and their conscience did not bother them. For example, the apostle Paul did *"many things in opposing the name of Jesus of Nazareth"* (Acts 26:9-10). He persecuted the Christians in Jerusalem, *"ravaging the church, entering house to house, he dragged off men and women and committed them to prison"* (Acts 8:3). His life is described as follows: *"You have heard of my former life in Judaism, how I persecuted the church of God violently and tried to destroy it. And I was advancing in Judaism beyond many of my own age among my people, so extremely zealous was I for the traditions of my fathers"* (Gal. 1:13-14).

Having done all of these things, he stood before the rulers of his day and said, *"Brothers, I have lived my life before God in all good conscience up to this day"* and *"So I always take pains to have a clear conscience toward both God and man"* (Acts 23:1, 24:16). Did Paul's conscience bother him as he persecuted Christians? No, sir! In fact, when he showed *"raging fury against them"* (Acts 26:11), his clear conscience did not change the facts.

Consider some other people in the Bible. Paul said there were some who would *"depart from the faith, giving heed to seducing spirits, and doctrines of devils; Speaking lies in hypocrisy; having their conscience seared with a hot iron"* (I Tim. 4:1-2). Still others had "defiled consciences" (Titus 3:15). Does this

sound like these people are worthy of emulation? Of course, not! Therefore, we cannot blindly follow our conscience, and expect to be pleasing to God. Our conscience alone does not determine the truth.

One's Family

Some blindly follow whatever their family does. The problem is that doing this is about like following our conscience. Families can be helpful or harmful to us spiritually, depending on how they are! While we are expected to honor our fathers and mothers (Matt. 15:4; Mk. 10:19; Eph. 6:1-2), our family does not determine the truth.

There were some people in the Bible who followed their family, and they paid dearly for it. Consider Lot's wife (Gen. 19:24-26; Lk. 17:32). The screams of her family and loved ones meant more to her than the safety provided by God. In her disobedience to God, she was turned into a pillar of salt.

Many Jews followed the traditions of their families rather than Christ. Therefore, Jesus told the people, *"Do not think that I have come to bring peace to the earth. I have not come to bring peace, but a sword. For I have come to set a man against his father, and a daughter against her mother, and a daughter-in-law against her mother-in-law. And a person's enemies will be those of his own household. Whoever loves father or mother more than me is not worthy of me, and whoever loves son or daughter more than me is not worthy of me"* (Matt. 10:34-37; Lk. 14:26).

What Determines Truth?

Now that we know some things that do not determine truth, what determines truth?

God

Jesus said, *"Sanctify them in the truth; your word is truth"* (Jn.

17:17). In saying this, we see that God's word (not man's) is synonymous with truth. When we speak of truth, we are speaking of God's word; and to speak of God's word is to speak of the truth! Jesus said that the truth is what makes men free (Jn. 8:32). Our Lord also said, *"Already you are clean because of the word that I have spoken to you"* (Jn. 15:3). Whose word was He speaking? God's (Jn. 12:49-50)!

Looking to David, *"the sweet psalmist of Israel"* (II Sam. 23:1), we read His words of praise to God's word when he penned, *"all your commandments are true"* (Ps. 119:151). He also declared, *"And now, O Lord GOD, you are God, and your words are true"* (II Sam. 7:28).

Since God determines the truth, when we push away the truth we are pushing away God (Rom. 1:28)! When we say that truth is relative, we have cast God aside as King. We are trying to determine what is truth, rather than yielding to God and His word. This is a dangerous position in which to be, because it is God who determines truth, not us.

A beautiful description of God's word is found in II Timothy 3:16-17: *"All Scripture is breathed out by God and profitable for teaching, for reproof, for correction, and for training in righteousness, that the man of God may be competent, equipped for every*

good work." Based upon what has been said, we know that we could not make it through this life without God's word.

God's word is what is to be preached and taught today (II Tim. 4:2, 2:2). Why must this be done? Because in so doing, we are spreading the truth! The truth that transcends borders, racial lines, and all other man-made divisions!

Conclusion

God's word is what determines the truth because it is the truth (Jn. 17:17). That is why we stress that *"If any man speak, let him speak as the oracles of God"* (I Pet. 4:11)! Nothing else determines the truth. This is made clear in Galatians 1:6-9. If we follow our thoughts, or what any man says, then we are jeopardizing our soul's salvation!

Let us determine that we will let nothing keep us from following the rock-solid, unchangeable, indestructible word of God! This is all that matters. If we lose our soul, we have lost it all (Matt. 16:26). This is why it is so important that we follow the Lord's will and not man's whims. When we appreciate the fact that it is God who has determined what is the truth, it makes the choice much easier, doesn't it? Who will we follow, God or self? Truth or error?

May we follow God's will, so that one day we can see Heaven together (Rev. 22:14, 17-19).

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I want the truth, give me book, chapter, and verse!

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